Forensic Scientist (Evidence Coordinator & Liaison)
CS-0401-12

INTRODUCTION

This position is located in the Department of Forensic Sciences (DFS). The mission of the DFS is to provide high-quality, timely, accurate, and reliable forensic science services using best practices and best available technology, focusing on unbiased science and transparency, to enhance public safety and health.

The position is responsible for receiving laboratory requests for analysis at the Central Evidence Unit (CEU) and evaluating for appropriate course of action related to forensic analysis. The position requires knowledge of evidence management techniques as long with basic knowledge of the various Forensic Science Laboratory testing methods.

MAJOR DUTIES

Accepts requests for analysis from various stakeholders of the DFS. Contacts and communicates with attorneys, detectives and other criminal justice professionals regarding evidence and forensic case management to prepare for submission to the forensic casework units of the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) or other Divisions of the DFS.

Handles, preserves and maintains evidence submitted for the Forensic Science Laboratory (or other DFS Divisions) to prevent contamination; properly maintains and documents chain-of-custody.

Coordinates work activities with other sections within the laboratory; and provides consultation regarding analytical results and investigative leads. Utilizes knowledge and experience in forensic science to provide best practices on evidence direction and advice on analysis to ensure efficiency and appropriate forensic testing.

Coordinates, prepares and conducts evidence transfers to the caseworking units of the laboratory.

Communicates with attorneys and/or investigators regarding independent laboratory testing requirements and timelines. Ensures CEU personnel complete delivery of evidence items following instruction from submitting agencies/attorneys and/or court orders.

Maintains manual and computerized records including evidence and/or chain of custody documents and records related to submission of evidence to caseworking units.

Participates in the evaluation of CEU processes to determine best practices for collection, preservation and submission of evidence to the caseworking units. Participates in development of policies and standard operating procedures for the CEU.

Participates in and provides follow-up for meetings and teleconferences with agency partners and USAO's office for evidence evaluation and acceptance to the laboratory for forensic analysis.

Keeps abreast of current industry, scientific, and regulatory developments and issues; communicates strategies to accommodate change; and prepares clear, concise, technically competent, regulatory compliant reports and presentations.

Testifies in court as an expert witness.

Operates specialized software on multiple computer platforms.

Performs other related duties as assigned.

KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED BY THE POSITION

Comprehensive knowledge of principles, theories, concepts and practices of analytical chemistry, physical science, or biology or related field to the work. Ability to recommend analytical methods, to solve problems or respond to technical issues on materials subject to analysis in the laboratory.

Knowledge of mathematics and statistics as they relate to analytical laboratory work.

Knowledge of quality assurance procedures and accreditation standards; proper procedures and standard laboratory rules and safety precautions regarding chemicals, toxins and biohazards and evidence collection and preservation procedures.

Knowledge of the rules of evidence and the methods used in presenting evidence in court; and policies and procedures for maintaining evidence chain-of-custody integrity.

Ability to prepare technical forms, reports, and other correspondence; and excellent oral and written communication skills.

Ability to maintain effective working relationships with associates, consultants, regulatory agencies, and the general public; and ability to work safely without presenting a threat to self or others.

Ability to recognize and work with chemicals and biohazards in a safe manner; understands the variety of scientific tests and analyses utilized in the laboratory.

Skill and ability to apply various software applications; and skill and ability to use a personal computer to prepare, store, and retrieve data and knowledge of software affiliated with the assignment.

Ability to testify effectively in court.

SUPERVISORY CONTROLS

Works under the administrative direction of the Crime Scene Sciences Director who outlines objectives and available resources. The supervisor discusses timeframes and the scope and nature of the assignment including the possible stages. The incumbent independently plans and carries out assignments, and interprets policies and procedures in terms of established objectives, keeps supervisor informed of progress on potentially controversial matters.

Completed assignments are reviewed for conformance to guidelines, feasibility, soundness of overall approach and the effectiveness of meeting objectives, deadlines, and expected results and adherence to requirements.

GUIDELINES

Guidelines consist of policies and procedures of DFS; governing laws and regulations of the District and Federal Government; methods, processes, techniques, procedures, protocols, testing regulations, previous/precedent cases, technical references, forensic techniques and literature, catalogs and handbooks, internal protocol and instructions, etc. These guides are normally applicable, but may require the incumbent to exercise judgment when applying them to specific work situations/cases that may not be covered.

COMPLEXITY

The work requires performing a variety of research and tests which often times are different or unrelated based on the crime scene requiring substantial know-how in solving significant issues and problems of situational difficulty and physical impediments. Determines the appropriate process, sequence and direction of the work and interprets the collected evidence and test data in order to identify whether modifications are required and/or if there are any questionable problems or issues. Adaptability and flexibility is required in order to adhere to protocols are essential; and contends with the absence of criteria; and with new methods and equipment. Exercises discretion and sound judgment in determining proper courses of action from personal experience and must be able to assess and evaluate a variety of situations, problems, conditions, or questions.

SCOPE AND EFFECT

Conducts scientific investigations including collecting the appropriate samples to prepare for examination/testing; and prepares documentation regarding findings and analyzes that is instrumental in preparing the results of the tests; and identifies problems that may alter collected evidence. Ensures that all documentation is in the appropriate order for court cases and/or final discovery.

The results of the work affects the department's credibility adequacy, accuracy and effectiveness in of the field investigations, laboratory tests, and ensures it relevancy to the case to assist with closure. The results are also binding and affect the judicial proceedings.

PERSONAL CONTACTS

Contacts are with agency officials and employees, laboratory personnel, consultants, attorneys, regulatory agencies, the general public, law enforcement, other scientists, and investigators.

PURPOSE OF CONTACTS

Contacts are for the purpose of exchanging factual information, collecting/gathering and processing the crime scene, exchanging information, ensuring the orderly flow of work as it pertains to crime scene. Works cooperatively with the public and other City employees; and work safely without presenting a risk to self or others.

PHYSICAL DEMANDS

Work is sedentary, however, some work requires periods of walking, standing, bending, climbing, or driving a motor vehicle. Also, some work requires sufficient personal agility to collect and process evidence in a variety of environments (laboratory, evidence storage facility, etc.). Occasionally carry items weighing up to 50 pounds, such as bags and/or boxes of evidence, small instruments or samples, and other similar materials Incumbent must possess sufficient manual dexterity to manipulate and operate laboratory equipment; must be able to visually distinguish color, shape, size, number and picture resolution quality; must be able to withstand exposure to disagreeable elements such as malodorous and/or decomposing samples, blood, bodily fluids, etc.

The incumbent is subject to exposure to dead and decomposed bodies and bodies that may pose a health risk, strong odors, insects, hostile and emotionally charged situations and animals. Manual dexterity, flexibility and boxes/cases that may require considerable strenuous physical exertion such as lifting/moving objects up to fifty (50) pounds; and long periods of standing, walking, stretching, bending and sufficient eye sight and hand coordination is required.

WORK ENVIRONMENT

The work environment includes office setting, laboratory conditions, training facilities, and courtrooms. The incumbent may be exposed to hazardous materials, toxic substances, and blood borne pathogens and is required to follow safe laboratory practices and wear protective clothing, including facial masks, safety glasses, gloves, etc.

OTHER SIGNIFICANT FACTORS

A Bachelor of Science degree in a natural or forensic science from an accredited university; graduates of programs accredited by the Forensic Science Educational Program Accreditation Commission (FEPAC; www.aafs.org/fepac) are preferred; two (2) years of experience and training at a forensic laboratory.

SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS

This position's duty station will be housed within the Consolidated Forensic Laboratory (CFL) which is a protection-sensitive facility. As such, incumbents of this position shall be subject to criminal background checks, background investigations, and mandatory drug and alcohol testing, as applicable.

The nature of the DFS mission necessarily involves the potential risks associated with biological or chemical hazards, including morgue functions. Although contact with these functions is intended to be minimal, the risks are nevertheless possible; training to recognize, address, and mitigate these risks is required as is dealing with potentially personally difficult topics, such as crime, death, and disease.